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## *The Role of Islamic Faith-Based Organization in Building Solidarity and Resilience among People of Different Faiths in Northeast Thai- land: A Case Study of Foundation for Educa- tion and Development of Muslims in North- east Thailand-FEDMIN<sup>1</sup>*

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### ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are to examine the role of FEDMIN in building solidarity and resilience between Muslims and Buddhists and to find a model of peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths in northeast Thailand called "Isan region". The research area was focused on the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhist in particular in Ban Nong Muen Tao village, Mueang, Udon Thani province. The study found that there were four important roles of FEDMIN in building solidarity and resilience among people of different faiths. Firstly, demonstrating the real image of Islam and Muslims to the other people of different faiths through the FEDMIN leaders' role and personality in practicing peaceful coexistence, FEDMIN's Santhitham Wittaya School, Muslim village model, which were described as "an intellectual contribution of Muslim community for the public", FEDMIN Muslim area as a field trip attraction to the Authorities. Secondly, encouraging Muslims and Buddhists to set up a suitable atmosphere of dialogue of action based on socially engaged Islam and Buddhism concept which was demonstrated by the faith-based community forum as "comfort space" in which a suitable atmosphere of dialogue of action can exist. Third, empowering religious institution to play a vital role in preaching the principles of peaceful coexistence to believers becoming citizen of the society through Islamic sermon-Khutbah, Islamic class, establishing Santhitham Wittaya school as a substantive contribution from Muslim community to the public, and Community Radio Station project as a positive media which supported to create an atmosphere of citizenship among

people of different faiths in the village.

Key words: FEDMIN, Islamic Faith-Based Organization, the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between Muslims and Buddhists.

### INTRODUCTION

In a world of integration, no country today is religiously monolithic. Religious diversity is both an intra-and interreligious reality (Yusuf, 2003, 2007). With a population of about 62 million people, Thailand is one of the religiously pluralistic countries in the world. In spite of the 94% majority of the population who are Buddhist, Muslims make up about five percent, while less than one percent identify themselves as Christians. Hinduism, Sikhs, and other "traditional" religions are practiced in Thailand (Yusuf, 2003, 2007). The Thai constitution does not declare Buddhism as Thailand's official religion, and states that discrimination against a person on the grounds of "a difference in religious belief" shall not be permitted (The U.S. Department of State, 2003). Thailand has long been identified herself as a multi-religious country with Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and traditional religions co-existing since the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1257-1377), when the kingdom of Sukhothai ("Dawn of Happiness") was established as the first truly independent Thai Kingdom (Gilquin, 2005).

Although, the Thai Muslim minority and Buddhist majority groups lived together for centuries and accommodated in religious coexistence and interreligious dialogue, neither group has tolerated doctrinal changes. The coexistence between both sides is rather limited, taking place mostly at the social level rather than inter-faith dialogue. It is nearly restricted to the "marketplace", where Muslims and Buddhists interact with each other as sellers and buyers, resulting in surface understanding of each other's religious doctrines and traditions. Muslim communities must participate in the socio-political arena as well as the religious realm of society (Yusuf, 2003). All majority-minority coexistence, in the case of Thailand, has its own unique features and characteristics. Conflict and tension between people of faiths may be due to

differences in religious doctrines and political theologies, as seen with the religious tension in the Middle East, and the sectarian conflicts in Northern Ireland, for example. In the case of Southeast Asia, however, coexistence between religions is more influenced by cultures, ethnicities, and languages. Prapertchob (personal communication, August 11, 2010) mentioned that with different faith - based conflicts, there are various kinds of conflicts between people of different faiths living together in the same communities/countries across the world. One type of conflict is religious based, particularly seen with Muslims and non-Muslims in the Middle East. Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand generally coexist in peace, but some parts of the country, such as the Deep South, remain an exception. The religious-ethnic conflicts that plague the Deep South have a tremendous negative impact on the relationship between Muslims and Buddhists, and adversely affect both the local and national population who has thus far remained peaceful. As a result, the events in the Deep South region have caused more than 1,000 deaths including both Muslims and Buddhists and also the international community has seriously paid an attention to how Thailand will be able to solve this conflict situation so that peace can once again return to the region (Yusuf, 2006). The grip of animosity has reached as far as Isan region, the Northeast region of Thailand, where Muslims only account for a fraction of the population (Prapertchob, 1984).

Isan is the subject of a research study conducted on the coexistence between Muslims as the region's minority with Buddhists as majority. According to the case study, Muslims as either the minority or majority communities in the South and Central regions of Thailand means they could potentially influence society. On the contrary, Muslims in Isan are a very small minority community. The region itself is the largest in the country in term of both area and population, but there are at most 20,000 Muslims. According to the National Statistic Office (2000), there were 18,069 Muslims in the northeast (6,844 men and 11,225 women).

In addition to the causes of conflict of Muslim and Buddhist communities in the Northeast region, Sohsan, (2010) studied and found that there were many factors behind the conflicts between both sides. For example, competition in local political elections, mutual misunderstandings of each other's religious practices, the Deep South conflicts, and international conflicts in which

Muslims often play a role. In the case study of Ban Nong Muen Toa village, Mueang, UdonThani Province, the research area, a primary survey found that "...the causes of the conflicts between Muslims and Buddhists in the community are not only from the impacts of ongoing conflict outside the region but also from the impacts of conflicts inside the community, particularly the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding in villagers' own daily lives of coexistence among people of different faiths (Muslims and Buddhists)...." The perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between both sides in the research area arises from conflict events in both the Deep South of Thailand and in the international arena in which Muslims play a role. In particular, after the event of January 2004, the complications in the research area were increasing in terms of mutual misunderstanding and mistrust between Muslims and Buddhists. Buddhists were reluctant and suspicious of Muslims, assuming they were related to the conflicts from outside their communities, in addition to their existing concern about Muslims increased immigration to Buddhist neighborhoods and villagers in Ban Nong Muen Tao (Prapertchob, personal communication, August, 11, 2010). One of Buddhist teachers who is now working at Santhitham Wittaya School located in the research area explained that; "There were lots of questions from Buddhists toward Muslims such as Why do they (Muslims) have to kill the innocent people? Why do Muslims seem to be so wicked?" (Rattanaorn, personal communication, August 27, 2010). On the other hand, Muslims have perceived that; "Why don't they (Buddhists) understand more about our own daily life, as if we are strangers, even though we have been here for almost two decades and we have worked and helped in term of development of the village, as its members, along with them?."

The conflict situation in the research area appears nonexistent. Interviews with people of both faiths in the area revealed that Muslims and Buddhists have their own perception of each other. Buddhists perceived that the growth of the Muslim community shown by various structures such as the building of a school, mosque, foundation, and youth center in the village of Ban Nong Muen Toa would have a tremendously negative impact on their own daily lives, and that frequent visit of Muslims from outside the village may be a threat to them as well. They also believe that the purposes of many activities of the Muslim community were to dominate

and rule them in the future. “They (Muslims) might kill us and even need to drive us out of our homes,” claimed a Buddhist who was interviewed by the researcher. According to one Buddhist’s perception towards Muslims, Rattanaporn, (personal communication, August, 27, 2010) noted; “It is true that there are some tensions which are now emerging within the Buddhist community. As they look at Muslims, they are afraid of increasing numbers of Muslims. Some say if any Muslims want to be a land owner, please tell us to refuse buying our land for them.” Therefore, the perception of misunderstanding of daily life between both sides is gradually increasing. While they might not be an “open conflict” for the time being, they threaten to destroy the peaceful coexistence of both sides. Although, the impacts of misunderstanding and mistrust between both Muslims and Buddhists don’t currently have a negative impact, the gradually increasing misunderstanding is a threat for both sides. Both sides are beginning to perceive that they are coexisting in a dangerous situation if nothing is done quickly. The initial observation found that there are no “open conflict” between Muslims and Buddhists, despite many situations of misunderstanding and mistrust between both sides. What are the factors and mechanisms that work closely with both people of faiths to reduce those kinds of perception effectively?.

One factor, or mechanism, is the role of the Foundation for Education and Development of Muslims in Northeast Thailand (FEDMIN). The role of FEDMIN, which is an Islamic faith-based organization in Isan, has been working closely with people of different faiths (particularly Muslim and Buddhist communities) for over a decade. It aimed to promote and build a peaceful coexistence environment among people of different faiths. FEDMIN has been continuing to achieve proactive and careful development of Muslim and Buddhist relations in the village of Ban Nong Muen Tao. Additionally, the researcher sought to find out a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslim and Buddhist communities in the region. The model created through this research study could potentially be a suitable model for resolving the ongoing conflict and worrisome situations in the Deep South region.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was a qualitative descriptive research project. The research was composed of in-depth inter-

views and participant and non-participant observations. Approaches to key informants and population were conducted as they feel free to participate and interview with the researcher, depending on their availability and allowance. The research area was scoped and focused on the peaceful coexistence between people of Muslims and Buddhists in Ban Nong Muen Tao village, Mueang District, Udon Thani province, an upper province in northeast region of Thailand. The FEDMIN headquarters has currently been located in a Muslim community which for over a decade has been the minority group in a predominately Buddhist community. In the research area both sides have been affected by misunderstanding and mistrust among themselves due to the perception that, Muslims are associated with violent conflict situations in the Deep South of Thailand and internationally. Therefore, Buddhists feared the linkage between those Muslims and their own neighbors. The Key Informants (KI) for this research is the people (villagers) of different faiths in Ban Nong Muen Tao village (not specific in age, sex, or professions) that are involved in community and FEDMIN activities. Both are observed and recorded. Additionally, other parties who are involved, concerned or willing and ready to share their ideas and experiences on the issues, and the model of peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths are also included. This paper, I will therefore focus upon the role of FEDMIN in building solidarity and resilience among Muslims and particular Buddhists, to find out a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in the research area and also presenting the recommendations for national policy on peaceful coexistence and further research.

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEDMIN AS AN ISLAMIC FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION IN ISAN REGION**

The northeastern region (hereafter is called “Isan region”) is the largest region in the Kingdom of Thailand, accounting for one-third of both population and area. The total population is about 22 million people. In the past, the region has been widely known as the most affected by drought and most undeveloped area of the country. However, during the past decades, the Royal Thai Government has put great effort towards development in this region and addressing the basic problem of poverty. Though, poverty is a problem that the country

has faced for decades, it has been alleviated to a certain extent (Sohsan, 2010).

For over a decade, FEDMIN has been playing an important role in developing and supporting Muslim individuals and communities to be more active through its activities and networks throughout the region since it was officially established in 1998. In the beginning, FEDMIN was well-established enough to provide supports for Islamic education and development in Isan region by combining the two important projects, IEP and Muslim Youth Center in Udon Thani. The projects have been in operation actively over a decade. They sought to gain legal status through an initiative to register the organization which took place in order to gain a larger share of the budgets and resources from other organizations and donors, including from both the public and private sector. The operation of the foundation have since been officially recognized and able legally to own land and property. So far, it has owned more than 8000 square meters of land (about five rais), including two main building for its school and headquarters. The main goals of the foundation are to support an Islamic education in the region, to cooperate with government agencies and the private sectors for developing an Islamic education system, to support and encourage people to give more attention to Islam, to set up Muslim youth centers in several cities, to support building new mosques, to cooperate with other non-profit organizations and work together for the public interest in the region, and finally to avoid political affairs altogether. In the first decade of operation, the foundation established its first project, IEP, by sending Islamic volunteer teachers to various Muslim communities across the region where they were high demand for education of young Muslims. This was applied to enabling Islamic education system in the region. Later, the Muslim Youth Center, located in downtown Udon Thani, was set up to provide an Islamic environment for Muslim youths from various Muslim communities, not only those in Udon Thani. The youths lived together at the center and were provided the opportunity of general studies at government schools near the center, while having a chance to study and practice Islamic fundamental principles in the early mornings, night, and during weekends. At that time, building Muslim Youth Centers in big cities of the region, like Khon Kaen, Ubonratchatani and Nakhonratchasima were initiated with the support of both

FEDMIN committees and Muslim community leaders. The vision of those centers was to produce future leaders for their own communities and for the region as a whole. They believed those youths would be trained from the centers with full knowledge and virtue. That vision, however, would never be realized without the support of Muslims in and outside the region. The foundation would also be responsible for building mosques and Islamic centers for promoting Islam in localities throughout the region. The Office of the National Culture authorized the establishment of the foundation on November 11, 1998. The President of FEDMIN, Dr. Preeda Prapertchob, delivered a speech at FEDMIN's fifth anniversary on July 19, 2003 at the Foundation for Islamic Center of Thailand in Bangkok, mentioning that it first appeared in public on December 4, 1995 at the great hall of the Khlong Khum Mosque in Bangkok. "We all, as FEDMIN's committees and staff, have long been marching for Muslims in the region, through our souls and spirits of accomplishments, FEDMIN began from nothing; this foundation is the first and only Islamic faith-based organization in the region. We are so proud of it, and it is widely supported by local Muslims and by Muslims throughout the country. We are committed to the organization because it creates the benefits and advantages for Muslims, not only in the region but in the country." In addition, he said that; "All activities that we provide youth camps, Muslim women seminars, a Youth Center in Udon Thani and etc., are for developing and empowering Muslims who live in peace with their non-Muslim fellows. FEDMIN is responsible for support, and also teaching them to realize and understand Islamic teaching in all aspects of daily life. We hope that this foundation will be a main mechanism for Muslim community development." Unlike other Islamic faith-based organizations in other parts of the country, which are provided budgets by owners or donors from Middle Eastern countries, FEDMIN has to fund for budget and activities through organizing the FEDMIN annual fair at its headquarters in Udon Thani. Sometimes, but not often, its annual fair is set up in Bangkok for the main donors who are from Bangkok and other parts of the country. Undoubtedly, all of its staff and committees are fully devoted to working hard and are very determined to improve their own particular Muslim communities. They are not hesitant to acquire funds from outer organizations in order to support their work and activities.

However, they give the priority to local and regional support is especially important because their members are the people who are primary beneficiary of FEDMIN activities. The biggest challenge that FEDMIN is now facing is building its capability to help Muslim communities in the region help themselves become contributors to other faith communities on many initiatives, rather than only recipients and beneficiaries. The communities have been committed to taking a responsibility and duty as “Ummah Muslim”, to build a better place of peaceful coexistence for their own Muslim community and for humankind. In order to reduce the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between Muslims and Buddhists in the research area, FEDMIN has to work closely together with people of different faiths in the village in all dimensions that it can do more than just religious issues for building up trust and mutual understanding between them as soon as possible. Therefore, when trust and mutual understanding is built and then the building solidarity and resilience among them will follow. To be attained this ultimate purpose; FEDMIN has played vital roles which are categorized into four constructive roles in building solidarity and resilience among Muslims and Buddhists in order to bring a trust and mutual understanding back to them to be as usual.

## DEMONSTRATING THE REAL IMAGE OF ISLAM AND MUSLIMS TO THE OTHER PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS

One of the causes of conflicts is “a wicked image of Islam and Muslims” that Buddhists has experienced in their own daily lives through media reporting Muslims as terrors and even a threat for them. As results, they were reluctant to engage with Muslims as their neighbors. To this issue, the leaders of FEDMIN have realized that they must do something to show them “a real image of Islam and Muslims” that their neighboring Buddhists should more understand rather than to believe what media repeatedly reported. The research found that there were three achievements in which FEDMIN has already done to reach out other people of different faiths by demonstrating that real image of Islam and Muslims to them. First, it is clear that the roles and personalities of the two leaders of FEDMIN, the late Al-Marahum Hajji Haroon Samadeh and Dr.Preeda Prapertchob, have proven themselves as “a bridge” significantly between both minority Muslim and majority Buddhist communities.

They seriously dedicated themselves to work with the majority “as minority leaders” in the village with their good relationship and generosity. They had good relationship with not only other villagers but officials at local, provincial and national levels. They understood that Muslims must act as citizen of the village in partnership with their neighboring Buddhist in all affairs. Muslims should not shy away from responsibilities to develop the village where they were part of it. With the humble personalities, they were honored and respected by not only Muslims but Buddhists who were willing to engage with them. They have showed “what any Muslim should do for community”, tried their best to explain “what Islam is and what Muslims are?” by demonstrating through their own daily lives and activities rather than trying to convince others getting to know about Islam and Muslims by preaching and propagating. As “a bridge between the two communities”, which is one of the critical roles that they played as ‘mediator’ or ‘arbitrator’ who dealt with people of different faiths in solving problems and conflicts, such as a quarrel among Buddhists. Other, they tried to instruct families and Muslims to fully devote themselves to the public work. Importantly, they have left their roles and positive efforts to reduce and mitigate the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between Muslims and Buddhists as follows; 1) As Muslim minority leaders, they tried to attend the social activities and affairs of the village as a member. 2) They always invited Buddhist local officials and leaders to join Muslim community affairs, for examples; the FEDMIN’s annual ceremony, Muslim wedding ceremonies, etc. 3) Their daily lives were simple and easy. Everyone could mirror their personality easily. 4) they tried to create a good atmosphere of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists with love, compassion, smiles, and action. 5) They always instructed Muslims to never shy away from participation in village affairs.

Therefore, with their humble personalities and good will in which have been honorably recognized by Buddhists “as a bridge” between people of different faiths, at the same time, those helped build “a good atmosphere of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists” in order to build trust and mutual understanding among them as well. Second, with a vision of building a long-term trust and understanding among people of different faiths, the leaders of FEDMIN realized that “teaching



young generation with peaceful situation in the community is a critical action to do so. And to be achieved this vision, there must be a school or a community in which they can learn and live together in peace. As a result, a Muslim village model and Santhitham Wittaya school have been established to be a touchable model of peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths. These initiatives would be demonstrating a real image of Islam and Muslims for other people of different faiths. Also, this research found that a functioning Muslim village model and FEDMIN's school that have been set up in Muslim community of Ban Nong Muen Tao village called "an intellectual approach" the way in which the visionary leaders of FEDMIN contributed to the public. It is also an intellectual contribution from Muslim side for all. In particular, Santhitham Wittaya School where children of faiths could live and learn together in the same area, it provided "a comfort zone" or "a peaceful space" for leaning together. It helped create a trust and mutual understanding among children of faiths, at the same time, demonstrated a real image of Islam and Muslims among them and parents whose hopes to see their beloved ones grow up with a qualified school in which they could get it from this Muslim owned school in Ban Nong Muen Tao. In a point of rejecting Muslims in the past, the study has reaffirmed that Buddhist parents have finally decided to send children to this school with a reason that they wanted to see a future for their beloved children. They also agreed with FEDMIN to build a common future together. "It would be a better world for our new generation to live and coexist together. The children will be trained and taught by their beloved teachers who will give them good inspiration so that they grow up in an environment of diversity" (Siribudhwong, personal communication, December 23, 2010).

The two great leaders of FEDMIN have clearly demonstrated to the public their role in building a peaceful coexistence in the research area. They had a common vision of peaceful coexistence, fully realized that Muslims in the village as its minority must socially engage with others in all aspects of coexistence. Muslims must show how their presence benefits others, and also demonstrate their humble lifestyle, which is a tenant of Islam. As minority group leaders in the village, they understood that the best way to live peacefully with a majority group was to fully engage with the village affairs and to demonstrate the contribution of the Muslim

community with its resources, sincerities, and intellectuals so that sharing all good things with each other would be an advantage for the village members as a whole. Muslims commitment to sharing and contributing to others is of foremost importance.

The President of FEDMIN's ultimate goal of peaceful coexistence is that, "we must fight for maintaining such a place of peaceful situation in Isan region where both Muslims and non-Muslims can have their religious freedom under the protection of the Thai constitution. Therefore, we must help to promote a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and others in order to ensure that people of different faiths can live together in peace within the region without an open conflict, like in other parts of the world." Thus, the two great leaders of the Muslim community are exceptional examples of building a peaceful coexistence in the village. Without their effort and vision, Muslim community in Ban Nong Muen Tao village would never be a peaceful community. A future challenge for Muslim community is to maintain the reputation that the two founders carefully created for them. Third, FEDMIN has a strong commitment to demonstrate that Muslims in Ban Nong Muen Tao village or even in the entire Isan region are not involved in violent conflicts in the Deep South area or anywhere else but they are deeply concerned about that and ready to show that how Muslim community in Isan region can live together in pace with other people of different faiths. Thus, FEDMIN provided its Muslim area of Ban Nong Muen Tao and other Muslim communities around the region "as field trip attractions" to security and development-based governmental authorities. Those have expressed their interest in FEDMIN's role of promoting and building a place of peaceful coexistence among people different faiths. Those authorities brought their officials and Muslim leaders from the southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat to FEDMIN headquarters to discuss the issue of peaceful coexistence, using Isan region as a constructive model of pluralistic society in the country. It provided and pointed out many discussion topics, including the evolution of the Muslim community as the region's minority living with non-Muslims, the role of FEDMIN in promoting a peaceful coexistence situation and, the region's development as a bridge to create good relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. FEDMIN has been in touch with government authorities and agencies to propose policies of

peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths at regional and national levels. They promoted the idea that “all people of different faiths can live together in peace in the same community”. It also encouraged authorities to get involved in the Deep South conflict situation between both Muslims and non-Muslims. As an organization coordinator, it has contacted some Muslim communities to host authorities during their field trips. In sum, the role of FEDMIN in demonstrating a real of Islam and Muslims through its visionary leaders and their efforts can fully help build trust and mutual understanding between Muslims and Buddhist. It would be supportive of building solidarity and resilience among people of different faiths which resulting the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between and among them.

#### ENCOURAGING MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS TO SET UP A SUITABLE ATMOSPHERE OF DIALOGUE OF ACTION BASED ON SOCIALLY ENGAGED ISLAM AND BUDDHISM

The role of FEDMIN in encouraging Muslims and Buddhists in the village of Ban Nong Tao to participate in the same landscape of activities or programs which is a very useful for helping create a suitable atmosphere of dialogue of action in order to fully support them to exchange points of views in order to be conducive to mutual understanding between them as well. In this regard, the Royal Thai Government also helped fully support to create that atmosphere in collaboration by launching its Lanboon Lanpanya forum in which all people of different faiths in the country could participate in. It is also an important policy of the Royal Thai Government to bring the potential roles of religious institutions whether Buddhist temples, Islamic mosques, Christian churches, Hindu temples or Sikh temples back to communities, and serve as community centers as was seen in the past. The government hopes that communities take full responsibility for the forum. Therefore, the Department of Religious Affairs and other authorities are only supplementary components of the forum as its advisors. They are committed to fully encourage with community management of project organization. There are several goals of the forum. First, opening up religious centers to become “constructive centers”, in which Thai people are able to use them as learning centers to make all kinds of merit based on any religious teaching.

Second, the forum hopes to reintroduce lost local cultures and traditions back to community through religious vessels. Finally, it aims to create what it called “a beatific community” in Thai society through various projects. Al-Mubarak mosque of Muslim community in the Ban Nong Mean Tao village was selected to become one of Udon Thani province’s religious centers, and to join the province’s Lanboon Lanpanya forum on April 20, 2010 under the Creative Economic Planning of the Strong Thailand Scheme of the Thai government. There are eight selected religious centers, comprising of six Buddhist temples, one Islamic mosque and one Christian Church, all of which are engaged together under the Udon Thani’s Lanboon Lanpanya forum.

The Al-Mubarak mosque was also selected to become one of eight religious centers in the province, and has been playing a role to constructively create a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims. Hence, Lanboon Lanpanya forum demonstrated an achieved goal. The Minister of The Ministry of Culture, H.E. Nipit Intarasombat, has certified that Al-Mubarak mosque was proudly selected as a recognized model of Lanboon Lanpanya forum on March 7, 2011. The forum, however, has played significant roles to serve as ‘a peaceful space’ in which Muslims and Buddhists who felt comfortable to work together for common interests of the village through Al-Mubarak mosque’s forum as follows; First, it helped support the representatives of the two communities gathered together to think about how to seek a common interest for the village through a series of the forum projects which has been initiated by their collective decision. Despite this forum was initially set up by the Royal Thai Government, but those representatives from the two communities were determined to participate in. It was also the first time for both Muslim and Buddhist communities had a good opportunity of collaboration in working with each other for enhancing mutual relationship between them after the unrest situation in the Deep South region began in 2004. The study has showed that it served as a preparatory step of building a suitable atmosphere in collaboration between them. During those meetings there were both Muslim and Buddhist representatives. A warming discussion between them on many issues of the forum was observed. Sometimes, arguments and disagreements among participants surfaced. By the end, however, they came to conclusions that all accepted and complied with. It inevitably created

a sense of peaceful coexistence between both sides. The forum, thus, helped create a suitable atmosphere of working together after a long period of time of mistrust and misunderstanding between them. Also, this study has reaffirmed that Muslim community Al-Mubarak mosque has been one of the village properties for all members they were welcomed and felt more secure to engage each other than before. Second, the forum helped create a suitable dialogue of action among people of different faiths in a reality. In fact, Muslims and Buddhist were concerned enough upon mutual respect to each other. They tried to understand the limitation of boundaries of each religious beliefs and rituals while having in participations. According to Imtiyaz Yusuf (2009) remarks that dialogue of action between Muslims and Buddhists should be involved by religious engagement is called "Socially engaged Islam and Buddhism" which is one kind of social engagements that will address upon various issues of building mutual respect, understanding, relationship and trust to seek the pursuit of common good between them. Dialogue of action between Muslims and Buddhists in the research area is still a new phenomenon and gradually increase during the Lanboon Lanpanya forum was taking part. The dialogue of action was a core concept that Muslims and Buddhists used in participating the projects. During the projects they also never talked about religious beliefs, they have expressed to mutual respect and keep tolerance to each other. They only engaged with socially engaged Islam and Buddhism which they could do so. Prior to the forum took place, the representatives of Muslim and Buddhist communities committed to seek a common ground of participating the projects. They used the forum as a positive approach to reach each other; particularly Muslim sides had a good opportunity to socially engage with their neighbors. The projects of the forum have opened up a "comfort space" in which Muslims and Buddhists could express their own interest and desire. They talked about the plan for making sufficient economy among the people in the village, well-being project, local wisdom and heritage transition for next generation, English learning project, and a plan for protecting community environment. All mentioned projects of Lanboon Lanpanya forum served for both Muslim and Buddhist communities' affairs where they have been living together in the same village. Those have shown that the forum was an outstanding example of building peaceful coexistence between both

sides. Although there were many projects which were set up for only Muslims due to the forum was hosted by Al-Mubarak mosque, it's interesting to note that many projects were deliberately set up for all religions in order to work closely together in an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence. Also, the research found that there was no compulsion in any religions, Muslims as the host for the forum have never used it to convince others to embrace in Islam, and they realized that it was a sensitive issue that they much be careful. The both sides held their identities and voices to be heard honestly.

In this regard, the mosque committees tried to support Muslims to eagerly engage with Buddhists in the village's affairs as part of it. The projects of the forum, on the other hand, have initiated the importance and potentiality of the dialogue of action based on socially engaged Islam and Buddhism into a reality and an action on the ground because people of different faiths can candidly reach to understand each other through activities which they are involved in informal participations rather than learning through formal ones. It is noted that dialogue of action must be done through social activities the way in which Muslims and Buddhist feel comfortable to engage with rather than talking only about the ideas holding at meetings or conferences. In addition, dialogue of action was a substantive core of building trust and mutual understanding among people of different faiths in Ban Nong Meun Tao village as well.

## EMPOWERING RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN PREACHING THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE TO BELIEVERS TO BECOME CITIZEN OF THE SOCIETY

FEDMIN played a vital role to empowering Muslims and Buddhists to recognize that they need to act as citizen of the village so that the common interest of the village must be built by all members because they deserve to be beneficiaries of that interest. It also has tried to play a constructive role in encouraging Muslims and Buddhists to act as citizenship of the village through various activities and affairs whether through Lanboon Lanpanya forum, school projects, and Islamic sermon called Khutubah on Friday or others. To Muslim side, FEDMIN tried to encourage them to be part of the village not as a voicelessly marginalized group; they have tried to encour-



age Muslims to contribute what it called 'an intellectual value' to the public as much as Muslims can do best. There were, however, two points which FEDMIN has encouraged its Muslim members whose responsibility was to put added value of being Muslims to the public. First point, to teaching Muslims on Islamic principles of peaceful coexistence through Friday communal prayer and its Islamic sermon called Khutbah and Islamic class for all Muslim youth. They have been instructed to fully engage with other people of different faiths based on the Islamic principle of coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims including Buddhists. The issues of peaceful coexistence, charity, the culture of giving, war, humanitarian aid, social welfare, the role and position of Muslims as minority group in non-Muslim states including the Isan region, the preservation of environmental safety, fighting against diseases, eradicating radical discrimination, crimes against humanity which of them have been described by the Islamic teachers in the classes for youth, the Imam and Khateeb on Friday communal prayer for all members.

According to a principle of coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in the research area, Muslims have seriously been instructed to about what Muslims can do and cannot. Therefore, the peaceful coexistence issue, it was often raised by the Imam and the Khateeb of the mosque to preach Muslim members. Many Muslims who usually visited the mosque on Friday observed that peaceful coexistence was often addressed by the preachers and that they realized the importance of the issue and recognized its pertinence to their lives. It is clear that the mosque has provided opportunities for their responsibilities to get involved in both Muslim community and the village affairs. The mosque's Friday Islamic sermon or Khutbah is a major key mechanism which has been delivered by both the Imam and the Khateeb of the mosque, and can be described as "community monitor" to teach Muslims a preparatory stage to engage with other faiths. In this step, FEDMIN has attempted to promote the Muslim members with the concept of peaceful coexistence in an Islamic perspective in order to encourage them to be concerned about how to live in peace with their Buddhist neighbors in interaction on daily life. For this reasons, Muslims must be well prepared themselves in order to be ready to engage with other people of different faiths as citizen of the village. Observations on the teaching upon peaceful coexistence matter through

either Friday's Khutbah or Islamic classes towards particularly youth group, there are some concerns about what the Imam, the Khateeb and Islamic teachers have been preaching for Muslim youth. Hence, they must be concentrated on what Imtiyaz Yusuf (2011) remarks that the majority of the young generations are not attracted to religions that restrict and operate on parochial interpretations; the youth today is also becoming alienated because of overwhelming materialism and technocracy. They seek new ways of interpretations of religions which the religious bureaucratic institutions do not seem able to deliver. However, the Imam, the Khateeb and Islamic teachers of Al-Mubarak mosque have more realized on that issue. They tried to adapt their teaching approaches such as analyzing the contemporary world situations based on Islamic perspectives like Arab Spring, Climate change, Diseases and etc., to Muslim youth to whom they must be intensively treated about Islamic principles in order to be well prepared themselves becoming the next community leaders in the future.

Second point, as part of the society, FEDMIN has been committed to provide an intellectual approach to the wider public not only Muslim community but others. The leaders and committees of FEDMIN have been trying to put a "substantive contribution" into the society which was called it as a 'quality education for all'. Santhithum Wittaya School initiative was one of intellectual approaches that FEDMIN had provided for the society as a whole. That's the contribution from Muslim side to the public as part of the village of Ban Nong Muen Tao. Also, Lanboon Lanpanya forum of Al-Mubarak mosque has been committed to play through Muslim community mosque as a community center in serving not only Muslims but Buddhists in the village who were participants of the mosque activities. The Muslim community of Ban Nong Muen Tao village tried to demonstrate that they needed to join closely with Buddhists as part of the village sincerely. They also tried to create their mosque to become "an area of dialogue of action" or "comfort zone" in which all people of different faiths could participate in. The mosque played a vital role to conceive a great opportunity for both Muslim and Buddhist communities to act closely together for their village development as much as they thought before. Therefore, it is proven that Muslims have done a lot to be part of the village undoubtedly. In addition, the community radio station project of the forum which was

run by Mr. Prathin Wongsorn, the current sub-district headman and village chief, every early morning. It was a positive mechanism to communicate and send a good message to between both sides and also to promote a peaceful coexistence between people of different faith in the community. He often discussed local and national news, and sometimes touched on international topics. During each day's broadcast, he discussed village news including Muslim community affairs. He discussed Santhitham Witthaya School, FEDMIN, Al-Mubarak mosque, for instance. He also promoted the teachings of all religions, Thai cultures, and local traditions to villagers, so that they could peacefully pursue their own believes. In addition to his efforts to support a peaceful coexistence among his people in his village, he encourages to support mutual respect in daily lives. He mentioned that; "a leader who is a main key to either makes problems or resolves them. Therefore, I have to contemplate what I am doing seriously" (Wongsorn, personal communication, December 20, 2010) "In my doctrine, people have to get involved in all village affairs; they have the rights to access important information that they deserve to know. I am committed to do more for their rights" (Wongsorn, personal communication, December 20, 2010). Whatever he does as the village leader strongly supports to create a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists. Therefore, his community radio station project as part of Lanboon Lanpanya project could be described as a positive mechanism to effectively promote peaceful coexistence. The study found that the role of community radio station and the goodwill of Mr. Prathin Wongsorn have helped and supported not only a peaceful coexistence but a sense of belonging and citizenship of Ban Nong Meun Tao has already been emerged among people of different faiths. Therefore, this project would not be successful in promoting a sense of citizenship and peaceful coexistence without the efforts of a visionary leader like Mr. Prathin Wongsorn. Importantly, there is an important thing to consider the role of media, such as community radio stations. It is a positive mechanism to reach Muslims and Buddhists on every issue and discuss the issue of building a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists. To the contrary, it could be used to create such a perception of ethnocentrism and bias among the people in the village. It would be possible for it to create "violence among Muslims and Buddhists", because of its power to easily propagate a

sense of fear and perception of mistrust and misunderstanding.

Therefore, the role of the mosque and its forum has fully supported to create a peaceful coexistence and a sense of citizenship among Muslims and Buddhists in Ban Nong Muen Tao village. Furthermore, Muslims have a commitment to demonstrate the real image of Islam and Muslims: They are often labeled as terrorists or strangers in the village. Therefore, Al-Mubarak mosque and the Lanboon Lanpanya forum help support Muslims to repaint their image and Islam's image through their participation in various projects of the forum.

## PRODUCING YOUNG GENERATION AS "SEED OF PEACE" IN A COMMUNITY OF DIFFERENT FAITHS FOR LASTING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS

One of ultimate goals of FEDMIN mission is to produce younger generation of different faiths who are eagerly optimistic to live together in harmoniously peaceful coexistence in the same society. Therefore, Santhitham Wittaya School was inspired by this mission as being an educational institution where students, parents from different background of faiths can have a platform for discussions, sharing points of views and experiences so that they can be understood and must be protected their rights to be mutual respected. That's the mission in which FEDMIN must reach for. There were two approaches that the school has provided its roles for producing students of different faiths becoming as 'seed of peace' in the community as summarized;

First, there was one of decisive policies of the school was to set up a primarily stage of trust and mutual understanding building among children of different faiths in the school. Therefore, the school provided an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence called a "comfort zone" for all children of different faiths who can live and learn together in without any discrimination by each other under the atmosphere of peaceful coexistence learning. It was focused on 'learning by doing strategic approach' which the students of different faiths could be trained to be able to help themselves by their beloved teachers through a variety of activities that children could come up with "an idea of familiarity " among children of different faiths. They were taught to become generous

people, with moral-universal principles, to live with people of different faiths and traditions in the same place. They were also trained with the learning by doing concept for mutual understanding each other through a variety of activities in which they could practice to working closely together. This step was a significant role of the school which its students were being prepared to be mutual respected while living in the school.

Second, the school's module and methods for promoting the mutual understanding among religions has been made by the school. Its aim was to instruct its students to be known each religion whether Buddhism, Islam and even Christianity. The school also focused on mutual respect and understanding to each religion rather than letting one religion dominated over other religions. The three major religions of the world, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, were carefully taught in the classrooms for students to receive religious essentials and principles. Despite the school has its own officially national holiday, but religious days such as Eid Al-Adha day, Eid Al-Fitr day, Visakha Bucha Day, Magha Puja Day, as well as Buddhist Lent have been recognized as its official holidays. Teaching the essentials of religions is more important to the school's students because they have the rights to know each religion's ideology in order to better understand each religion and their fellow students that followed each. In the class they learn about the religious founders, history, and holy books associated with each religion. The school's Managing Director reaffirmed that "the school has been committed to teaching our students at least the basic essentials of the three major religions, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. The school recognizes our students are a small group, but they should be well trained. The first step of their education is at the fundamental level. We need to see our next generation live in a peaceful situation" (Praween, personal communication, December 21, 2010). The school has also well prepared the students by teaching the basic principles of various religions in class. According to the different faith management, the school acknowledged the problems based on difference of faith among the members of the community. There was an outstanding example was that Buddhist parents wanted the school to allow their children to pay respect to the Buddha in front of the school's flag every morning before the class. There were many times that parents seriously proposed to the school to allow their children to practice a Buddhist religious

ritual, so-called "Wai" , (in Thai term) meaning to pay respect to the Buddha. They were also very much concerned about Buddhist doctrines in the daily life of their children. Therefore, the rights of Buddhist children must be fully protected by school policy. The parents wanted to see their children held their religious rituals at school proudly. At the beginning, this problem seemed to widely escalate in the public. There were many arguments on it among the Buddhist parents. Some did not worry while others did. Therefore, the school had to make a decision aiming to find an amicable solution. There were five steps in faith based conflict resolution to be addressed; First, "attempting to confine the conflict", they had to ensure that this problem would not deteriorate the good image of the school which was recognized in promoting peaceful coexistence among people of different faiths. Thus, they had to maintain its policy of peaceful coexistence for all members, from its teachers to its students. Second, "equally respecting all religions in action", the school was managed by Muslim owners and executives. Thus, managing diversity within its members was a key to success. The explanation about the issue was that despite the school being a Muslim school in the region; it had a policy to mutually respect all beliefs. There was no religious ritual in front of school's flag of any kind, including an Islamic ritual. Third, "seeking an alternative approach", in order to promote a mutual respect for the different faiths, the school set up its program called "Dharma Tour", aiming to visit a variety of religious places. First was a Buddhist temple of Ban Nong Muen Tao village, and then would be mosque and another time a church. The program provided a great opportunity for interfaith dialogue between religious leaders and the school's students and staff with the permission of their parents. Many Buddhist students gave alms to the monks as well as made merit along with the Buddhist teachers.

Third, "attempting to more explanation", the school executives were most sincere in response of the sensitive case and offered reasons to the parents immediately. As a result, those parents who questioned the school policies have accepted the way the school handled the situation. The school will then release its first handbook in the coming semester for particular parents and students. It will focus on how the members of the school can do their best for their religious rituals in the school and be very useful in avoiding any religious based conflicts and problems. Finally, "building up a common future", the

school and parents realized that they have their ultimate goals in common. They need to work together so their children can grow up with a high education and quality of life. Therefore, they have to cooperate and compromise together to create this school by their hands for their common future. More importantly, there is another mechanism that can help promote and maintain mutual relationship between Muslim and Buddhist communities in Ban Nong Muen Tao village is the school's Buddhist teachers who have been committed to engage with people outside the school. The Buddhist staff of the school has been doing their best to attempt to explain about the real situation at the school to the parents who are concerned about the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding towards Islam and Muslims. It is clear that the Buddhist teachers at the school have played a positive role to create trust and understanding between the school and the parents. They have been in connected with the parents to explain that "there is nothing to worry about in sending children to the school." On the issue of the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between both Muslims and Buddhists mentioned earlier, one mechanism being used to help resolve the issue is the "Buddhist teachers" being in constant contact with Buddhist parents.

However, their efforts to avoid such misunderstanding related to the situations of the Deep South conflict and the greater Muslim world have resulted in concern of possible connections to any forms of terrorists from other parts of the world. In order to resolve some tensions before escalating into "a violent conflict" among people in Ban Nong Muen Tao village, the Buddhist teachers, as one potential mechanism, can play a constructive role of protecting those tensions. They always kept in touch with the people of the village as representatives of the school to inform the people with the missions of the school in building a peaceful situation between their beloved children. They have definitely tried their best to explain to the people that this school's executives have never thought to convince any non-Muslim students to embrace Islam. As a result, the parents have gained more trust of the school than they had before. The constructive roles of the school's Buddhist teachers have helped us to reach the correct information about this school's missions and goal. They also helped us to understand that it would be a comfortable space for our children to learn and play within a peaceful environment of diversity happily. It is

clear that Buddhist teachers of the school have become "a bridge" between the two communities which is an necessary to exist in such a community of different faiths, their roles can have an authorized power to keep in touch with the people of different faiths so that they can use this bridge for reducing the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding and also for maintaining their mutual relationship among them. It is also remarked that the school has played a vital role to provide such an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence called "comfort zone" in which children of different faiths, as seed of peace, who would be growing up to become generous people of the society, along with an idea of familiarity, can benefit from that atmosphere where the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding among people of different faith is diminished by FEDMIN initiative of Santhitham Wittaya School. Nevertheless, the role of FEDMIN in building solidarity and resilience among people of different faiths could be concluded into four constructive roles; demonstrating the real image of Islam and Muslims to the other people of different faiths, encouraging Muslims and Buddhists to set up a suitable atmosphere of dialogue of action based on Socially Islam and Buddhism, empowering religious institution to play a vital role in preaching the principles of peaceful coexistence to believers to become citizen of the society, and producing young generation as "seed of peace" in a community of different faiths for lasting mutual respect and understanding among people of different faiths. Consequently, those four roles of FEDMIN have put to reduce the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between Muslims and Buddhists in the research area at last.

## THE MODEL OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND BUDDHISTS IN BAN NONG MUEN TAO VILLAGE

In order to be reaffirmed that the Isan region could be a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists, the study has showed that FEDMIN has played a vital role to help create such a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in research area so that they can live side by side in a peaceful environment after the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding occurred among them. In this part would illustrate that model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists based on the case study of the village in order for finding such a suitable model of

peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in which it could be applied for using in other parts of the country in particularly the Deep South region where conflict situations and even perception of mistrust and misunderstanding among Muslims and Buddhists still erupts. The model has been built by six comprehensive steps in a process of building up a suitable model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists in which any community of different faiths must be concerned and that FEDMIN has already tried to establish for reducing the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding among people of different faiths in the research area. Therefore, a process of building up a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists could be described as follows;

Step one is a process to create a trust and mutual understanding building between Muslims and Buddhists through the role of FEDMIN leaders, community leaders, the establishment of FEDMIN school and its staff particularly , the role of Buddhist teachers who have been trying to help create an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence . In addition, the Lanboon Lanpanya forum has also significantly supported this step of a trust and mutual understanding. It is crucial to be recognized that trust and mutual understanding building is the first step to be established in such a divided community based on mistrust and misunderstanding among people of different faiths where the community and religious leaders is a core element of that trust and mutual understanding building. FEDMIN and community leaders have played that role in their own areas by creating a suitable atmosphere of mutual relationship between both communities while demonstrating their positive personalities that the people could follow and being as a “bridge”, “mediator” for both sides. Fortunately, Ban Nong Muen Tao village has its leaders of Muslim leaders and Buddhist leaders who are visionary and generous. They more realized that mistrust and misunderstanding that occurred among their people has threatened their relationship in community. Therefore, they tried their best to tackle it seriously. In this step, FEDMIN’s school and its staff, modules and activities has also played an effective role to produce the next generation of different faiths “as seed of peace” so that they could grow up in a community of different faiths without bias and prejudice each other. Thus, the establishment of school where children of different faiths could be trained and nurtured together is a necessary step

that a community of different faiths must be considered to build trust and mutual understanding in a long-term way of peaceful coexistence. In addition, a process of trust and mutual understanding building must be serious to set up “a comfort zone of dialogue of action”, in which people of different faiths who can freely participate in. The Lanboon Lanpanya forum has been a significant platform to play that role. It was an important role and initiative of the Royal Thai Government that has provided such a peaceful policy by empowering and supporting the spirit of religious institutions and functions for gathering people of different faiths into the same place for acting together. That national policy must be expended as a long-term policy.

Step two is a process to empowering religious institutions and organizations to act as community center where all parties feel comfortable to engage with and play a crucial role in preaching the principles of peaceful coexistence to the people. Al-Mubarak mosque of the Muslim community has been provided for not only Muslims’ activities but people of other faiths could be involved in. There were following two significant roles of the mosque that played for its believers and the village’s members. First, the role in empowering its religious leaders and teachers implemented such a Khutbah (Islamic sermons), Islamic classes to the people on preaching the principle of peaceful coexistence in an Islamic perspective. The concept of peaceful coexistence must be one of elements of religious teaching for believers so that they should be instructed by that concept which must be applied into daily life. The study also has found that the concept of that peaceful coexistence in Islamic perspective has often been instructed to Muslims through Khutbah and Islamic classes. Second, empowering mosque to act as a community center where Muslims and Buddhists could join together in working on the area peaceful coexistence in action through many activities under the support of Lanboon Lanpanya forum and others. Therefore, a model of peaceful coexistence must be implemented by empowering religious institutions and organizations to play a constructive instrument of conflict resolution. Step three is a process to participation of Muslims and Buddhists in an area of socially engaged Islam and Buddhism which that participation must be involved in the respect and understanding the boundaries and limitation of different beliefs existed. The research area has demonstrated that model of peaceful



coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists must be built by creating a “peaceful space of dialogue of action based on socially engaged Islam and Buddhism”. That model has clearly showed that there must be interpreted it into a reality of action, therefore, FEDMIN had to implement its initiatives for building up that peaceful space in which people of different faiths could be engaged in whether establishing a school, a faith –based community forum where Muslims and Buddhists had that space to exchange, communicate and dialogue to each other by focusing on socially engaged Islam and Buddhism rather than focusing only on the religious principles from the Holy books in abstract . Therefore, this kind of dialogue of action must be supportive of being one core of elements in participating between people of different faiths as well. In addition, the forum like Lanboon Lanpanya forum must be implemented in every community of different faiths not just setting up as a short-term political strategy but a long-term one. Step four is a process to building up citizenship awareness among the members of the village. A sense of citizenship has been an important component of building up a model of peaceful coexistence in research area without that sense the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists has never been successful. Citizenship building in the research area has been created through all of FEDMIN efforts which are conducive to collaboration in the village affairs. FEDMIN has created a sense of citizenship among the members of the village, Muslims and Buddhists. To Muslim side, they have been encouraged to be part of the village by Muslim leaders’ visions, FEDMIN activities as well as Islamic teaching on peaceful coexistence through such Khubah and Islamic classes at youth and adult levels. Muslims have also been encouraged to contribute their own intellectual properties to the public such as establishing a school for all which has been recognized as an intellectual property for sake of the village as a whole and constructing a Muslim community mosque as a community center where all people of different faiths could make use of it for their benefits of peaceful coexistence building. Many activities have been set up under the name of the mosque and within mosque area too. That’s the substantive contribution of Muslim community to the village proudly. Moreover, the Buddhist community leader who has supported to create a suitable atmosphere of a sense of citizenship building through his vision of peaceful coexistence and his community radio

station every morning which also helped support that sense to be reality. The role of positive media like community radio station and the goodwill of Buddhist community leader must be very quickly analyzed to the process of building up a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists not only in the Isan region and throughout the country due to that media has been an important tool of conflict resolution which must be a necessarily component of that model of peaceful coexistence building. Step five is a process to collaboration building which is a very significant step for seeking common goals of the future for both sides. FEDMIN has determinedly provided a path of seeking a common goal for the future to Muslims and Buddhists in the community by building up the three following opportunities were; the first opportunity was a higher qualified educational system for children of different faiths by setting up the FEDMIN school at kindergarten and primary school levels, the second was to making economic and sustainable development program by building up the training center for economic and sustainable development which is being established to be completed .That center would be focused on job creation and human resource development in the village and the last point is going to be the community collative history writing in which there would have the history of Muslim and Buddhist community settlement and development. This program should hopefully help not only to create a sense of citizenship among people of different faiths but also to help build common goals of the future for all. To this point, it is clear that seeking common goals for the sake of the village is a decisive step of building up a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists. It also helps reduce the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding among people of different faiths for the future. Therefore, collaboration action plans need to be more addressed into reality and action in any community of peaceful coexistence where people of different faith live in.

All five steps has above mentioned are the main condition which is conducive to build the future step that is building solidarity and resilience between Muslims and Buddhists in order to eventually reach out the reduction of perception of mistrust and misunderstanding between them. Therefore, this process of building up a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists by FEDMIN involvement need to be more

addressed to be applied into another cases of mistrust and misunderstanding among people of different faiths in other parts of the country and therefore of the world. Therefore, if we want to find a peaceful place where Muslims and Buddhists can begin reconciliation process between and among them, Isan region including Ban Nong Muen Tao village, should be the foremost consideration. Muslims here are quite more moderate, open, and participatory. FEDMIN is therefore providing the process of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence building for the entire Thai society. (See appendix 1)

## **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION**

The study has showed that the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) is significantly emerging on the conflict resolutions to religious and faith conflict situations all across the entire world. FBOs has already played a vital role in building solidarity and resilience among people of different faiths who have been suffering their destiny in divided related to religious and faith conflicts. FBOs must also be involved in playing a constructive role in resolving religious or faith based conflicts in any community of different faiths and religions. Importantly, the study proved that FBOs have already demonstrated their potentiality to play a vital role in engaging with the society affairs more than just only the religious or faith issues and also their leaders could effectively deliver a significant role as “a bridge” among people of different faiths in divided communities related to faith or even political conflicts. The study also found that there has been less study about the role of FBOs, Islamic and Buddhism faith - based organizations, in building the understanding and mutual respect between and among Muslims and Buddhists who have been living side by side in the same area throughout the country. Particularly, the role of FBOs in building peace among people of different faiths and religion in the Deep South region of Thailand where the ongoing conflict situations and violence still erupts.

On the concepts of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists must be more seriously analyzed at national, local levels by the Thais than ever before so that the entire Thai society should never shy away to engage with people of different faiths and it must be said that the diversity among the Thais must be more concerned to study and understanding each other. That's the way to success in promoting peaceful coexistence among

people of different faiths in the kingdom. The study demonstrated that the Isan region is a suitable place of dialogue of action and a process of reconciliation between Muslims and Buddhists. Because Muslims in the region are more ready and willing to eagerly engage with society affairs and also they identified themselves as part of the Thai citizenship rather proudly. Therefore, the process of reconciliation between Muslims and Buddhists should carefully be addressed through the Isan region where Muslims are the region's minority but effectively to engage with other people of different faiths. In addition, FEDMIN, as Islamic faith based organization, has played a constructive role in engaging with region's development issues rather than just only religious matter. It has been recognized as one of Islamic FBOs to delivering “an intellectual contribution in an area of educational system” for not only Muslim society but the public as a whole. The school of FEDMIN has been established for that matter and as “a comfort zone” for children of different faiths who can live, learn and play at the same area in which a suitable atmosphere of peaceful coexistence exists. FBOs are therefore committed to build up a trust and understanding among people of different faiths for seeking a common goal for the future in which they are going to get there. Without a common goal of collaboration for the future that people of different faith can have the right to reach out, the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding would never been diminished, but FEDMIN has made it possible.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITY**

First, Muslim community should be eagerly engaged in the sake of the public as a whole. They have the potentiality to contribute “an intellectual contribution” to not only Muslim community but non-Muslim community. Therefore, they need to be respected as equal as others. Second, the concept of peaceful coexistence in an Islamic perspective must be addressed and delivered through Islamic sermon (Khutbah) and Islamic class for younger generation so that they should be more understood and realized what Islamic principle teaches on the matter. The mosque's Friday Islamic sermon or Khutbah is a key mechanism which has been delivered by both the Imam and the Khateeb of the mosque, and can be described as “community monitor” to teach Muslims a preparatory stage to engage with other faiths. Third, in a world of integration, Muslims must be well-prepared themselves

and ready to engage with wider community. They should create “a substantive contribution in an area of higher qualified educational system” by establishing their schools or institutions for children of different faiths where they can have “a peaceful space” to live in so that they are able to help reduce the perception of mistrust and misunderstanding among them for a long journey. Fourth, Islamic faith-based organizations including mosques must be re-organized for mobilizing their leaders, staff and resources in order to fully support to build up trust and mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in an area of religion or faith related to conflicts as a positive instrument of conflict resolution and community development. Fifth, mosques need to be more addressed their roles than focusing on religious rituals but their capabilities can be a community center for delivering other areas of community development and social engagement to non-Muslims in a path of peaceful coexistence building. Sixth, Muslim and Buddhist communities both need to establish a forum of cooperation and interfaith dialogue of action based on socially engaged Islam and Buddhism where they can work closely together in order for fostering peaceful coexistence to be reality for a long-term cooperation.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR NATIONAL POLITY ON PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

First, The Royal Thai government must strongly support a peaceful coexistence policy initiative through its initiatives like the Lanboon Lanpanya forum, particularly in faith-based community throughout the country. It is debatable whether such a peaceful policy that the government has attempted to enact would be applied long-time policy, or if it is just a political campaign and a short-term policy for electoral votes. Therefore, a “comfort space” whether Buddhist temples, mosques, Churches, and other congregations as community centers must be promoted to be established. Second, socially engaged Islam and Buddhism concept needs to be addressed and supported to further study for finding a suitable area of cooperation between Muslims and Buddhist. It must be applied into social development and engagement. Third, the Royal Thai government must establish a permanent forum of cooperation in which the dialogue of action between Muslims and Buddhists can be existed throughout the country in order to find out an amicable solution for peaceful coexistence among them. Fourth, the Royal

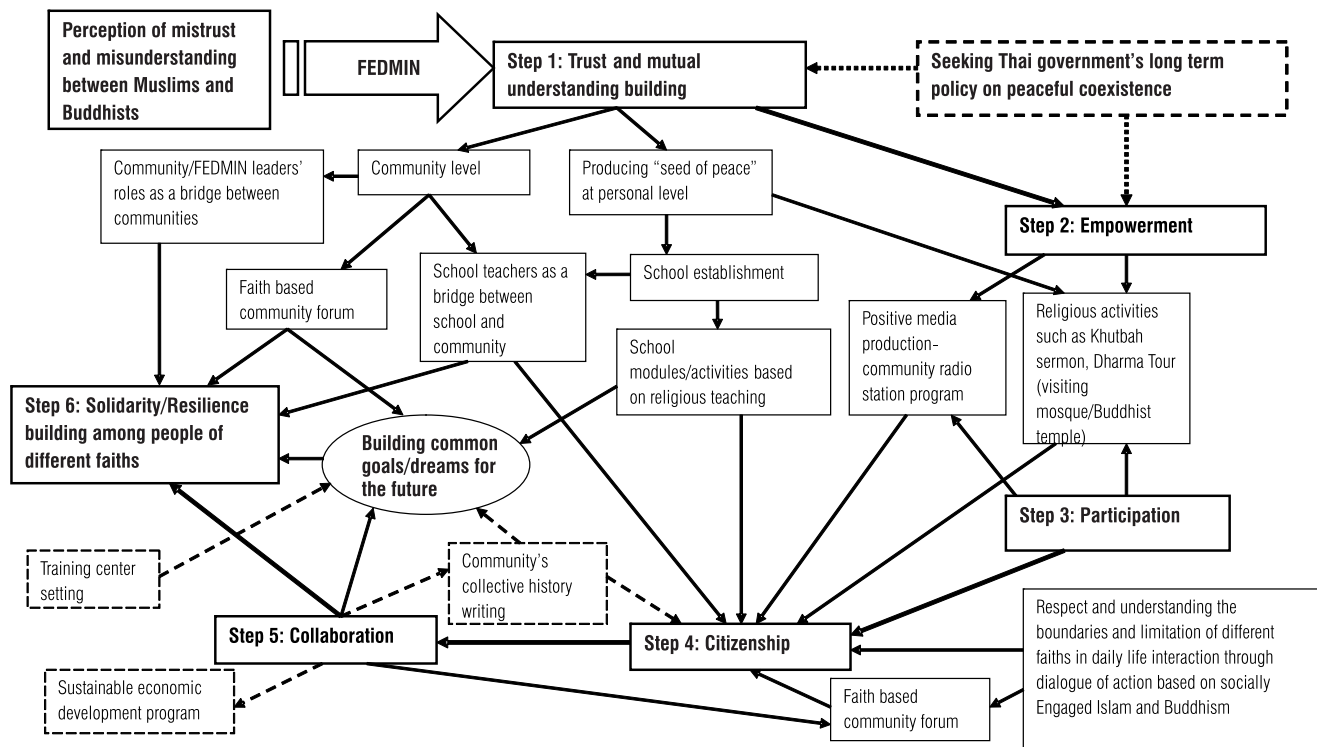
Thai government and its security-development based authorities need to apply such a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhist in the case study in the Isan region as a model of conflict resolution for religiously-ethnic conflict resolution in Deep South region. Fifth, the Royal Thai government must fully support faith based originations (FBOs), faith based communities to play a constructive role in implementing conflict resolution and community development. Sixth, it is important thing to consider the role of media, such as community radio stations. It is a positive mechanism to reach Muslims and Buddhists on every issue and discuss the issue of building a peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhists. Therefore, this kind of media must be implemented all across the country and the government needs to fully support to generate it freely. Seventh, the Royal Thai government needs to utilize the experts of faith-based organizations to train education and media professionals on Islam and Muslim community seriously. Eighth, the idea of establishing such a peace promoting school like Santhitham Wittaya School must be seriously considered by the Royal Thai government, the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Culture, as a model of peace promoting school where interfaith dialogue of action through the principles of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity can be taught in practice among children of different faiths who need to be nurtured becoming “seed of peace” for the future. Ninth, if the Thai society wants to find a peaceful place where Muslims and Buddhists can begin a reconciliation process between and among them, the Isan region should be the foremost consideration.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The further research study should be elaborately focused on the role of religious leaders and community due to they have also played a vital role “as bridge” in halting ethnic conflict, supporting a process of reconciliation, and making significant development and humanitarian contribution in community. They need to take responsibility for helping people to live in a world of diverse faiths and also they need to demonstrate people how to live with others who practice different faiths and religion. Therefore, they need to seek partnership among them the study should be how they can seek partnership among them in order to play their role effectively. The further research shall be the comparative study on the

roles of faith-based communities and organizations in building solidarity and resilience among people of different faiths between the Deep South region where Muslims as its dominated majority and Isan region which must be carefully addressed so that we may have a suitable model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Buddhist. It would be very useful to apply it into a real situation in which Muslims play as both minority and majority. God knows best.

## APPENDIX



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## (FOOTNOTES)

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